New Assassination Probes Delayed

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WASHINGTON — The House Rules Committee, with Mid-Southerners voting with the majority, Wednesday postponed indefinitely acting on motions that would have reopened investigations of several political assassinations, including the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr in Memphis.

The committee, by a vote of 9 to 6, agreed to defer action on a resolution to open investigations into the deaths of King and the Kennedy brothers and the wounding of Alabama Gov. George Wallace.

Rep. B. F. Sisk (D-Calif.), who led the opposition, said new investigations could do more harm than good. And, citing questions still being raised about the 1865 assassination of Abraham Lincoln, said new inquiries could not possibly erase all doubts.

Rep. James H. Quillen (R-Tenn.) said if new investigations produced findings that differed from earlier conclusions people might be more confused than ever.

"As for Dr. Martin Luther King," Quillen continued, "I fear a renewed investigation by Congress would bring about more dissension in our country."

Quillen noted that so far the courts have refused to grant a new trial to James Earl Ray, who has pleaded guilty to killing Dr. King. "They think he is guilty," Quillen said.

Rep. Trent Lott (D-Miss.) also joined the opposition.

Rep. Andrew Young (D-Ga.), a black who represents the Atlanta district where Dr. King's widow lives, said "the King family would like very much to have a full investigation."

"Looking back," Young said, "there is at least a possibility that some people back then were practicing politics by assassination.

The proposal for an investigation of all four shootings was proposed by Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Texas) with the backing of 64 other House members.

The resolution for an inquiry limited to the assassination of President Kennedy, also rejected, was offered by Rep. Thomas N. Downing (D-Va.) with about 125 cosponsors.

Downing said after the hearing he thought the committee might reconsider his proposal within a few weeks after the Senate Intelligence Committee completes and releases a report which is expected to touch upon some aspects of the Kennedy assassination.

And Bernard Fensterwald Jr., a Nashville-born Washington attorney who represents Ray and attended the Wednesday debate, said he believes proponents of new investigations gained from the hearings. But with court cases pending, Fensterwald said, he may have to ask that any inquiry of the King case be excluded from any congressional investigation.

Downing raised numerous qeuestions about the findings of the Warren Commission, citing recently declassified Central Intelligence Agency reports identifying the murder weapon in President Kennedy's slaying as a German Mauser rifle rather than the Italian Mannlicher-Carcano carbine that is in the national archives.

And he cited another recently released CIA document identifying the Soviet agent that Lee Harvey Oswald visited in Mexico City before the Dallas shooting as a Soviet KGB agent "connected with the Thirteenth, or liquid affairs, Department, whose responsibilities include assassination and sabotage."